

## CLAIMS

1. A method of transporting packet data and command messages through a communications network having at least one optical connection provided between provider edge nodes of the communications network, comprising:
  - establishing a pseudo-wire directly over the optical connection and between the provider edge nodes of the communications network;
  - tunneling the packet data within the established pseudo-wire and over the optical connection established between the provider edge nodes of the communications network;
  - tunneling command messages within the same optical connection established that is used to transport the packet data between the provider edge nodes of the communications network.
2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
  - said tunneling command messages including utilizing a command message encapsulation label for the command message,
  - wherein the command message encapsulation label notifies at least the provider edge nodes that the data being tunneled is a command message.
3. The method according to claim 2, wherein upon receiving tunneled data from the communications network at one of the provider edge nodes the method further comprises:
  - identifying the command message from the optical data received based on whether the data includes the command message encapsulation label.
4. The method according to claim 3, further comprising:
  - segregating the command message from the received data based on said identifying step; and
  - sending the segregated command message to a switch controller of the receiving provider edge node.
5. The method according to claim 1, further comprising: